

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4808
INFO AMCONSUL MUNICH PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY SOFIA

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STATE PASS BIB

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PROP PINT PL
SUBJ: SEMI-ANNUAL EVALUATION OF RFE BROADCASTING TO POLAND

REF: (A) 77 WARSAW 9298, (B) WARSAW 1042 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: FOR ITS POLISH LISTENERS RFE REMAINS AN IRREPLACE-
ABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION CONCERNING BOTH
INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN POLAND AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. WE
CONTINUE TO HEAR COMPLAINTS, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE "PROPAGANDISTIC"
AND TENDENTIOUS TONE OF SOME OF THE STATION'S OUTPUT. ON THE
BASIS OF A REVIEW OF BROADCAST SCRIPTS, WE FIND SOME JUSTIFICATION
FOR SUCH COMPLAINTS. END SUMMARY.

2. RFE CONTINUES TO SUPPLY ITS LISTENERS WITH A RICH DIET OF
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NEWS AND VIEWS ABOUT POLAND. AT TIMES THE FARE CAN BE UNPALAT-
ABLE TO BOTH FRIENDS AND FOES OF THE STATION, BUT FEW WOULD
DENY THAT RFE OFFERS PROVOCATIVE FOOD FOR THOUGHT. THE STATION
TACKLES ISSUES IGNORED OR DISTORTED BY THE OFFICIAL MEDIA AND
BROADCASTS INTERPRETATIONS OF EVENTS THAT CONTRAST PLAUSIBLY TO
THOSE CARRIED LOCALLY. IT THUS CONTINUES SUCCESSFULLY TO OFFER
POLISH LISTENERS A USEFUL AND WELCOME ALTERNATIVE TO REGIME-

CONTROLLED PRESS, RADIO, AND TELEVISION.

3. THE OFFICIAL MEDIA HAVE WAGED NO FULL-FLEDGED CAMPAIGN AGAINST RFE OVER THE FIVE MONTHS COVERED IN THIS EVALUATION (NOVEMBER 1977 THROUGH MARCH 1978), BUT THE STATION HAS TAKEN MORE LUMPS THAN IN THE PREVIOUS REPORTING PERIOD (REF A). THE GOP PRESS CITED A SERIES OF NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES ALLEGING CIA MANIPULATION OF AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA TO CLAIM THAT RFE IS A CIA TOOL. ON A NUMBER OF OTHER OCCASIONS, THE PRESS RAILED AGAINST RFE AS A RELIC OF THE COLD WAR. AFTER THE FEBRUARY ELECTIONS TO THE PEOPLE'S COUNCILS, PROPAGANDA BOSS JERZY LUKASZEWICZ CROWED THAT RFE HAD FAILED IN AN EFFORT TO PROMPT CITIZENS TO WITHHOLD THEIR VOTES -- INTERFERENCE, HE SAID, IN POLAND'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THE OFFICIAL MEDIA SCOFFED AT BIB CHAIRMAN GRONOUSKI'S OFFER TO OPEN RFE MICROPHONES TO REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN RIGHT OF REPLY TO RFE COMMENTARY. FURTHERMORE, AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED (REF B), A GOP REPRESENTATIVE EXPRESSED OFFICIAL DISPLEASURE OVER AN RFE BROADCAST ON THE RESIGNATION OF CULTURE MINISTER JOZEF TEJCHMA WHICH COMPARED CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE POLISH LEADERSHIP TO THE CHINESE "GANG OF FOUR". ALL THIS SEEMS TO INDICATE, CORRECTLY, WE THINK, THE REGIME'S CONCERN THAT RFE ENJOYS A SIGNIFICANT AUDIENCE IN POLAND.

4. RFE'S COVERAGE OF POLISH DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES AND PUBLICATIONS HAS BEEN THOROUGH AND EVEN-HANDED. THE STATION'S SUMMARIES OF AND EXCERPTS FROM THE MANY POLISH
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UNDERGROUND PUBLICATIONS EFFECTIVELY POINT UP ITS VALID CONTINUING CRITICISM OF REGIME CENSORSHIP. FURTHERMORE, THE CONTENT OF THESE PUBLICATIONS IS MADE AVAILABLE TO A WIDE AUDIENCE WHICH MAY LACK, OR PREFER NOT TO RISK SEEKING, ACCESS TO SAMIZDAT IN PRINT.

5. THE STATION'S REPORTAGE OF ACTIVITIES AND PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POLAND LIKEWISE IS BOTH EXCELLENT AND INDISPENSABLE, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE CHURCH'S SEVERELY CONSTRICTED ACCESS TO THE POLISH MASS MEDIA. DISCUSSION OF INTERNAL SOCIAL QUESTIONS IS BY AND LARGE WELL PRESENTED, ALTHOUGH HERE IT IS IMPORTANT TO AVOID OVERSTATED CRITICISM AND POLEMICIZING. PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF POLISH LAWS AND OFFICIAL DATA ARE USEFUL IN PROVIDING A MEANS TO JUDGE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE GOP BY ITS OWN LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS.

6. AGAIN AS LONG AS POLEMICS ARE AVOIDED, THE AIR TIME RFE SPENDS ON RECOLLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES CONCERNING POLISH CULTURE AND HISTORY IS GENERALLY WELL SPENT. THE RECORD IS SET STRAIGHT ON THEMES AND FACTS GLOSSED OVER, DISTORTED, OR IGNORED IN THE OFFICIAL TREATMENT OF SUCH SUBJECTS. AN ESPECIALLY

COGENT EXAMPLE WAS THE REMINDER OF GENERAL WLADYSLAW ANDERS' LEADERSHIP AT MONTE CASSINO IN WORLD WAR II, A FACT SUPPRESSED IN POLISH PRESS ACCOUNTS OF THE HOMAGE PAID BY FIRST SECRETARY GIEREK TO THE HEROES OF THAT BATTLE DURING HIS VISIT TO ITALY LAST FALL.

7. COVERAGE OF EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS ALSO USEFULLY EXPANDS ON, AND OFTEN FURNISHES AN ANTIDOTE TO, WHAT IS AVAILABLE IN THE INDIGENOUS MEDIA. ONE POLE VOLUNTEERED TO US THE SUGGESTION THAT RFE PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF INSTITUTIONS IN THE WEST AS A CORRECTIVE TO THE DISTORTIONS PERPETRATED IN THE OFFICIAL MEDIA. WE THINK THIS MERITS CONSIDERATION. IN ANY EVENT, RFE SHOULD NOT SHY FROM CRITICISM OF THE WEST. A JUDICIOUS BLEND OF EXPLICATION OF WESTERN SYSTEMS, AND ANALYSIS
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OF THEIR FLAWS WHERE THESE EXIST, CAN ENHANCE THE STATION'S REPUTATION FOR OBJECTIVITY AND BALANCE.

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8. ON A SOMEWHAT RELATED POINT, IN ITS COVERAGE OF DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES AS WELL AS OTHER EVENTS BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL, RFE ON OCCASION UTILIZES REPORTS AND COMMENTARY APPEARING IN THE WESTERN PRESS. THIS IS A DESIRABLE PRACTICE. CITATION OF OTHER, INDEPENDENT SOURCES OF FACTS AND OPINIONS HELPS BUILD AN IMAGE OF OBJECTIVITY AND AT THE SAME TIME BUTTRESSES THE STATION'S OWN EDITORIAL POSITIONS. A GOOD CASE IN POINT WAS USE OF WESTERN COMMENTARY ON THE INTRA-PARTY CONTROVERSY SET OFF BY POLITYKA EDITOR MIECZYSLAW RAKOWSKI'S ARTICLE ON DECENTRALIZATION LAST NOVEMBER. THIS LENT AN ELEMENT OF ADDED CREDIBILITY TO RFE'S TREATMENT OF A SIGNIFICANT POLISH INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT.

9. WE THINK ADDED EFFORTS TOWARD CREDIBILITY AND BALANCE ARE CALLED FOR, BECAUSE WE FIND THAT RFE AT TIMES STILL SUCCUMBS TO GRATUITOUS EDITORIALIZING THAT BELABORS THE OBVIOUS, OVERBLOWN RHETORIC, AND NEEDLESS POLEMICIZING, PARTICULARLY IN ITS DISCUSSION OF THE REGIME'S LEADERSHIP AND POLICY. FOR EXAMPLE:
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(A) THE TAGLINE ON THE OTHERWISE EXCELLENT MARCH 20 COMMENTARY (FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5541) ON THE ELEVENTH CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM IS REDUNDANT AND OFFENSIVE. RFE WOULD HAVE EFFECTIVELY SCORED THE FAILURE OF THE PLENUM TO COME TO GRIPS WITH POLAND'S AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS WITHOUT THE FOLLOWING: "AMAZING. THESE PEOPLE (THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE) DO NOT REALLY SEE REALITY, IT PRESENTS ITSELF DIFFERENTLY THROUGH RED GLASSES, OR PERHAPS THEY SIMPLY WANT TO MAKE THE NATION INTO SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT EXIST." (B) THE JANUARY 23 BROADCAST (FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5493) ON THE FEEBLE MEASURES UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOP TO INCREASE SUPPLIES OF CONSUMER GOODS GAINED NOTHING FROM THIS CONCLUSION: "IT SEEMS THAT THIS DOES NOT SAY MUCH FOR THE MAIN PLANNING COMMISSION, NOR FOR THE EXECUTION OF LAST YEAR'S GREAT 'ECONOMIC MANEUVER' WHICH PROBABLY DID MANEUVER BUT NOT IN A WAY WHICH WOULD SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE CONSUMERS." (C) THE IMPLICIT EQUATION OF HARASSMENT OF ACTIVISTS IN THE "FLYING UNIVERSITY" WITH "PRACTICES AND DISMAL LAWLESSNESS KNOWN FROM THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS" IN PANORAMA NO. 6046 OF FEBRUARY 24, MUST HAVE GRATED ON MOST POLISH LISTENERS, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL PERSUASION. (D) THE DESCRIPTION OF RECENTLY-APPOINTED VICE MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS MARIAN JANICKI (PANORAMA NO. 6046) IS AN OVERDOSE OF SARCASTIC EXCESS: "IT IS SAID AND WRITTEN ABOUT THE NOMINATED VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR THAT HE STARTED HIS CAREER AS A MILITIAMAN. SO NOT ONLY IN THE U.S. DO MILLIONAIRES START THEIR CAREERS AS PAPER BOYS OR SHOE-CLEANERS."

10. WE CONTINUE TO HEAR CRITICISM OF RFE ALONG THE ABOVE LINES FROM POLISH LISTENERS OF VARIOUS POLITICAL PERSUASIONS. NEVERTHELESS, WITHOUT THE STATION MANY WOULD FIND RADIO LISTENING HERE A WASTELAND. REFLECTING A VISION OF POLAND, AND PRESENTING A PICTURE OF THE COUNTRY AND THE WORLD, SHARPLY CONTRASTING TO

WHAT IS PORTRAYED IN THE INTERNAL PUBLIC MEDIA, RFE IS VIRTUALLY
GUARANTEED A WIDE POLISH AUDIENCE SO LONG AS IT MAINTAINS A
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MODICUM OF CREDIBILITY AND REASONED TONE. JERZY URBAN,
WRITING IN THE HUMOR MAGAZINE SZPILKI OF MARCH 19, EXPRESSED IN
AESOPIAN LANGUAGE THE FEELINGS OF THOSE WHO TURN RFE ON BECAUSE
THE STERILITY OF THE OFFICIAL MEDIA TURNS THEM OFF: "BEARING ALL
OF THIS IN MIND, I SUGGEST THAT WE SHOULD LISTEN TO THE RADIO
A BIT, BUT I DO NOT HAVE MR. MACIEJ S Z C Z E P A N S K I'S
BROADCASTING STATION IN MIND." STILL, RFE SHOULD NOT TAKE ITS
POLISH AUDIENCE FOR GRANTED, AND IT SHOULD AVOID THE TEMPTATION
TO PREACH ONLY TO THE COVERTED. BY AVOIDING EXCESSES OF
TENDENTIOUSNESS AND A "PROPAGANDISTIC" TONE, AND BY CONTINUING
TO PROVIDE OTHERWISE UNAVAILABLE FACTUAL INFORMATION, THE STATION
CAN ADD TO ITS FOLLOWING AMONG POLES WHO REMAIN ON THE FENCE,
WHILE HOLDING ITS LISTENERSHIP AMONG THOSE WHO BY AND LARGE
SHARE ITS OUTLOOK.
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